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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study of teachers located in the Northwestern United States was to examine their reasons for considering leaving the teaching ranks. The research analyzed teacher perceptions in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the realities of the work place and how they affect a teacher's decision to leave. The findings reported here resulted from the spring 1995 administration of a teacher attitude survey instrument to a random selection of 212 teachers, K-12, throughout Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The study found that 44 percent of the teachers occasionally considered leaving the profession. Reasons cited included student discipline, students' lack of motivation, and poor attitudes; emotional factors such as lack of fulfillment, boredom with the daily routine, stress, and frustration; lack of respect from community, parents, administrators, and/or students; difficult working conditions; and low salaries. Also, 49 percent of the population surveyed identified the professional prestige to be as they had expected it or better. Findings of this study were not unlike those from surveys conducted in 11 other states throughout the South, Southeast, and Midwest between 1991 and 1994. (Contains 5 tables and 16 references.) (JB)

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TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Numerous studies on teacher attrition have indicated various reasons why teachers decide to leave the profession. The objective of this study was to examine teachers', who were located in the Northwestern United States, reasons for consideration of leaving the teaching ranks. The research analyzes teacher perceptions in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the realities of the workplace and how they effect a teacher's decision to leave.

Surveys were sent to teachers in 600 randomly selected schools throughout Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. Two-hundred and twelve teachers responded. Indicators sited by teachers as reasons to leave included students, emotional aspects, lack of respect, working conditions, salary, and lack of reward.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

"Teachers are expected to be twice as good, twice as altruistic, twice as flexible and one-half as concerned with salary" as other professionals (McClay, 1995). Is this perhaps a major reason why teachers continue to leave or consider leaving the profession? Since the 1980's, educational researchers, administrators, and the public at large have scrutinized teachers and their career stability. People within the teaching profession are variously categorized as being part of a group of individuals who meet one or more of the following descriptions: "don't care about kids, couldn't do anything else, don't want to work in the summer, want to be home by 3:00 pm, really do care about kids, chose teaching because that's what they really wanted to do, normally have second jobs to supplement their incomes, or who do more school work at home than at work" (McClay, 1995). Is this, then, an accurate reflection of teachers' inclination to leave or stay in the profession?

Numerous studies on teacher attrition and retention have indicated varied reasons for leaving the profession. Bloland and Selby (1980), the Metropolitan Life Company Survey of Former Teachers in America (1986) and Lester (1988) identified attitudinal and demographic characteristics which are effective predictors of teacher attrition. Chapman (1984), Bobbitt (1991), Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991) and Karge (1993) found stress, non-teaching duties, student behavior, and lack of administrative support to be contributing factors to teachers exiting the profession. In analyzing the results of the Kappan/Gallup Poll, Elam (1989) reported poor teaching salaries and lack of professional prestige were factors expressed by teachers as reasons for dissatisfaction. Other reasons include teacher job satisfaction, identifying

lack of professionalism, collegiality, and recognition, and incompetent and uncooperative administrative (Green-Reese, 1992; Gnathal) .

The finding reported herein resulted from the Spring 1995 administration of a teacher attitude survey instrument to a random selection of 212 teachers, K-12, throughout Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. Thirty-four percent of the respondents were male and 66% female with 83% being European American, 16% Asian, 1% African American, 1% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. The reliability (.85-.95) of the Marlow-Hierlmeier Teacher Survey was determined during a 1989 survey of teachers in Florida. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' reasons for consideration of leaving the profession.

To Leave or Not to Leave?

Findings by Metropolitan Life (1986), indicated that one of the earliest predictors of discontent is whether or not the teacher considers leaving teaching. When asked if they ever considered leaving the profession for any reason, the following responses were reported:

Table 1: Consideration of Leaving

Never	Occasionally	Seriously	Left & Returned	Left/Returned Several Times
22%	44%	18%	15%	2%

Why Would Teachers Leave the Profession?

Teachers were asked to rank items in response to the sentence stem: If I were to leave teaching, I would do so because of . . .

Table 2: Consideration to Leave

	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	4th Choice
Students	26%	20%	14%	13%
Emotional Aspects	24%	21%	13%	17%
Lack of Respect	9%	14%	24%	16%
Working Conditions	14%	15%	15%	18%
Salary/Lack of Reward	8%	12%	11%	13%

Students

Student related factors that teachers identified as reasons for leaving included discipline problems, lack of motivation, and poor attitudes toward school and/or learning. For the last ten years (1985-1995), the Gallup Poll on the public's attitudes towards school has ranked discipline problems as the second biggest problem with which public schools must deal. Teachers are expected to deal with student behaviors in the classroom in a firm and decisive manner, and yet respect for individual student rights is also demanded. Although the public hears of these problems as associated with the school and/or teacher, the problems themselves often do not begin at the school but are brought school for teachers to solve.

Emotional Aspects/ Burnout

Lack of fulfillment, boredom with the daily routine, stress, and frustration were emotional aspects of teaching identified as reasons for considering leaving the profession. Teachers may exhibit the symptoms of burnout in ways such as emotional or physical exhaustion, reduced productivity, and/or depersonalization of the students

(Mazure and Lynch, 1989). The rising incidence of violence in the classrooms along with the other student related problems identified above contribute to burnout.

Lack of Respect

Teachers cited lack of respect from community, parents, administrators, and/or students as reasons for considering leaving. It is not surprising that teachers become disillusioned with education when the people with whom they must work, administrators, parents, and others in the community, devalue their importance. Many teachers believe that their training in education provides them with qualifications which should allow them to make decisions about what's best for students. According the 1993 Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 57% of the teachers surveyed believe not enough authority regarding decisions about students and teaching rests with the teacher.

Working Conditions

Under the heading of working conditions teachers identified problem factors such as class size, work load, non-teaching duties, paper work and lack of supplies. An associated reason identified was a lack of administrative support. A common belief appears to be that teachers who have administrative support tend to have more satisfactory working conditions. Frustrated teachers see poor working conditions as a sign of the administration's inability to provide leadership and inability to support the school in general.

Salary/Lack of Reward

Low salaries are commonly considered and reported to be one of the more significant reasons given by teachers for leaving the profession (Hammer, 1992). Salaries are not only economic in nature but reflect the status of the profession and are

often identified a reward for excellence in performance and productivity. In this study, salaries and/or lack of rewards did not rank among the top four reasons to consider leaving.

What About Those Who Have Left?

Teachers who had left the field either once or more and returned, 17% of the respondents, were asked to identify the primary reasons for their leaving. Most indicated that no one reason was more prominent than others, but that a combination of reasons contributed to their attrition.

Table 3: Reasons for Leaving

	Yes	No
Working Conditions	10%	7%
Students	13%	4%
Administration	5%	11%
Lack of Respect	11%	6%
Emotional Aspects	10%	7%
Salary/Lack of Reward	5%	11%

Professional Prestige: Do Teachers Have It?

The term profession indicates a degree of respect earned because of training, education, experience and the adherence to high standards and ideals. Many teachers express the opinion that classroom teachers are not accorded the professional prestige which their training, education and experience should afford them. Dissatisfaction in this area is one that approximately two-thirds of teachers and former teachers cite as a reason for leaving the teaching profession. This lack of respect includes society's

attitudes towards teaching as well as a lack of respect from students, parents and the community, low status, and lack of consideration as a professional (Marlow & Hierlmeier, 1991: Quaglia, Marion, & McIntire, 1991; Natale, 1993). Table 4 shows responses to the question: How does the professional prestige of teachers compare to your expectations prior to your beginning to teach?

Table 4: Expected Professional Prestige

Better than Expected	Worse than Expected	Expected
5%	51%	44%

Then, Why Do Teachers Stay?

Quaglia, Marion, and McIntire (1991) suggest that attitude has much to do with a teacher's decision to remain in the profession. Those who see teaching as a career, all-encompassing and life-long, rather than a job, present employment (which could change) in a particular situation, are more inclined to identify the satisfactions of their career. Additionally, those who identify intrinsic rewards as a measure of their competence and professionalism, and who do not emphasize extrinsic rewards or advancement, are more satisfied in this chosen profession.

Respondents from this survey identified five areas as the primary reasons for remaining in the profession.

Table 5: Reasons for Staying in the Profession

Not Qualified for Other Jobs	Calendar Year/ Family Needs	Retiring Soon	Needed Income	Teaching is Important
3%	8%	10%	25%	54%

Conclusions

Although there is cause for concern because 44% of teachers surveyed have occasionally considered leaving the profession, and 18% of those surveyed have seriously considered leaving, there is reason to believe that teachers are a group of dedicated professionals. Their dedication is evidenced by the finding that more than twice as many teachers (54%) believe teaching is important as compared to the twenty-five percent who remain in the profession because of the need for income. In contrast to the perceptions described by McClay (1995), these teachers appear to care about the students whom they teach and do not remain in the profession because of extrinsic rewards and motivation. This bodes well for teacher satisfaction and staying in the profession. This dedication combined with the fact that 49% of the population surveyed identified the professional prestige as expected or better than expected gives reason to be optimistic that there will continue to be a cadre of dedicated professionals in the classroom.

The findings of this study are not unlike those found in surveys conducted in 11 other states throughout the South, Southeast, and Midwest between 1991 and 1994 (Marlow, Betancourt-Smith, & Marlow). This would indicate that this is not a regional phenomena, but that teachers are indicating a growing sense of satisfaction with their chosen career. Hopefully, this trend will continue.

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